

3. MAIN CAUSES OF MORTALITY

Over 4.6 million people died in EU countries in 2017 (Figure 3.7). The main causes of death in EU countries are circulatory diseases and various types of cancer, followed by respiratory diseases and external causes of death.

Circulatory diseases continue to be the leading cause of death across the EU, accounting for about 1.7 million deaths in 2017 or 37% of all deaths. Ischaemic heart diseases (including heart attack and other diseases) and stroke are the most common causes of cardiovascular mortality (see indicator “Mortality from circulatory diseases”). Mortality rates from circulatory diseases are much higher among men than women (about 40% higher).

Some 1.2 million people in EU countries died of cancer in 2017, accounting for 26% of all deaths (25% among women and 28% among men). Breast cancer and lung cancer are the leading causes of cancer death among women, whereas lung cancer and colorectal cancer are the two main causes of cancer death for men (see indicator “Cancer incidence and mortality”).

After circulatory diseases and cancer, respiratory diseases are the third leading cause of death in EU countries, causing some 366 000 deaths in 2017 or 8% of all deaths. The vast majority of these deaths occur among people aged over 65. Respiratory diseases accounted for 7% of all deaths among women and 9% among men. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the most common cause of mortality among respiratory diseases, followed by pneumonia.

External causes of death, including accidents, suicides, homicides and other violent causes of death, were responsible for 4% of all deaths among women and 5% of deaths among men across EU countries in 2017. The most important causes of violent deaths are suicides (48 000 deaths in 2017) and transport accidents (about 27 000 deaths). Transport accidents are a particularly important cause of death among young people (aged 18-25), whereas suicide rates generally increase with age (see indicator “Adult mental health”).

Looking at other specific causes, Alzheimer’s and other dementias accounted for 5% of all deaths in 2017, and were a cause of death more important among women. Diabetes represented 2% of all deaths across EU countries.

The main causes of death differ between socio-economic groups, explaining the gap in life expectancy. Social disparities are generally larger for the most avoidable causes of death (Mackenbach et al., 2015).

Overall mortality rates (age-standardised) ranged in 2017 from less than 900 deaths per 100 000 population in France, Spain and Italy (which is about 15% lower than the EU average) to over 1 400 deaths per 100 000 population in Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Hungary and Lithuania (over 40% higher than the EU average) (Figure 3.8). The main reason for the much higher mortality rates in this latter group of countries is higher mortality rates from circulatory diseases, the leading cause of death. In Hungary, higher mortality rates from cancer also explain a large part of the difference with the EU average (Eurostat, 2020).

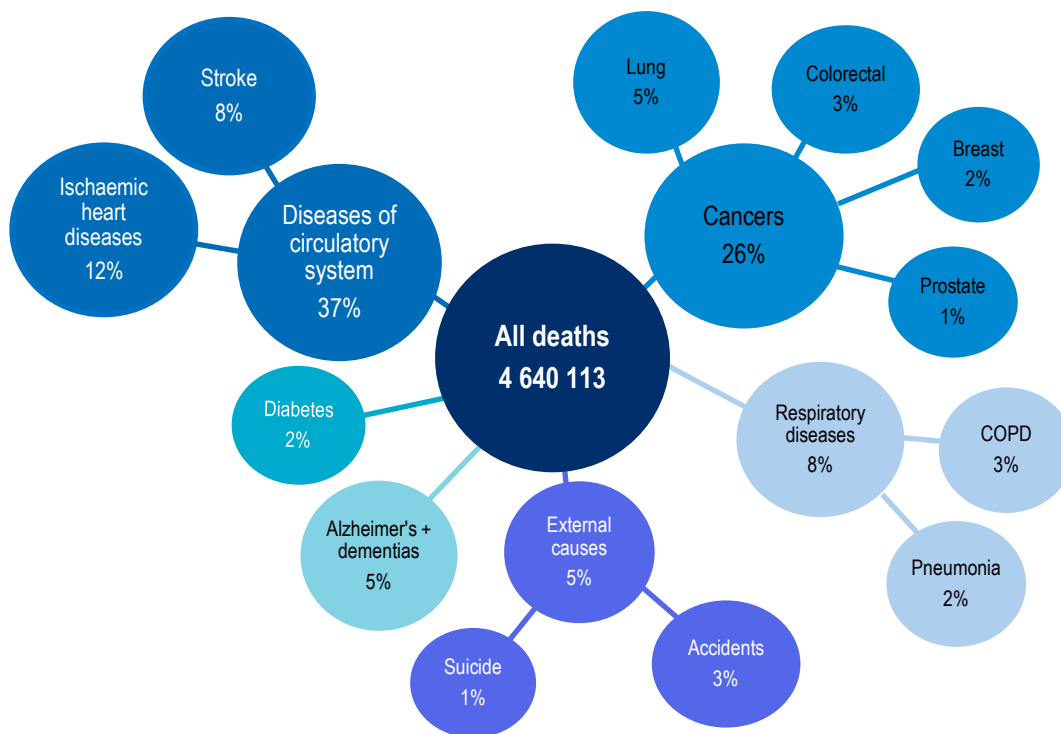
Definition and comparability

Deaths from all causes are classified to ICD-10, Codes A00-Y89, excluding S00-T98. The grouping Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias include G30 (Alzheimer) and F01-F03 (other dementias). Mortality rates are based on the number of deaths registered in a country in a year divided by the population. The rates have been age-standardised to the revised European standard population adopted by Eurostat in 2012 to remove variations arising from differences in age structures across countries and over time.

References

- Eurostat (2020), *Causes of death statistics*, Statistics Explained, September 2020.
- Mackenbach, J. et al. (2015), “Variations in the relation between education and cause-specific mortality in 19 European populations: A test of the ‘fundamental causes’ theory of social inequalities in health”, *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 127, pp. 51-62.

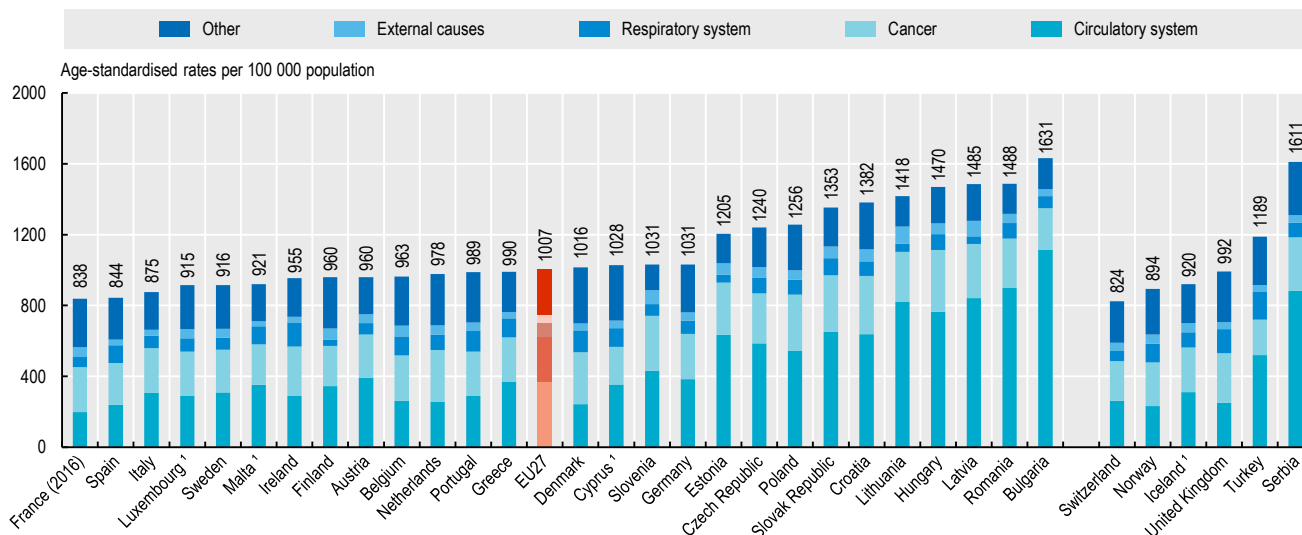
Figure 3.7. Main causes of mortality in EU countries, 2017



Note: Data refer to 2016 for France.
Source: Eurostat Database.

StatLink <https://stat.link/fyc0lq>

Figure 3.8. Main causes of mortality by country, 2017



Note: External causes of death include accidents, suicides, homicides and other causes. The EU average is weighted (using imputed estimates for France for 2017). Data for France refer to 2016. 1. Three-year average.
Source: Eurostat Database.

StatLink <https://stat.link/jktr03>



From:
Health at a Glance: Europe 2020
State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/82129230-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2020), "Main causes of mortality", in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5d757b99-en>

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